



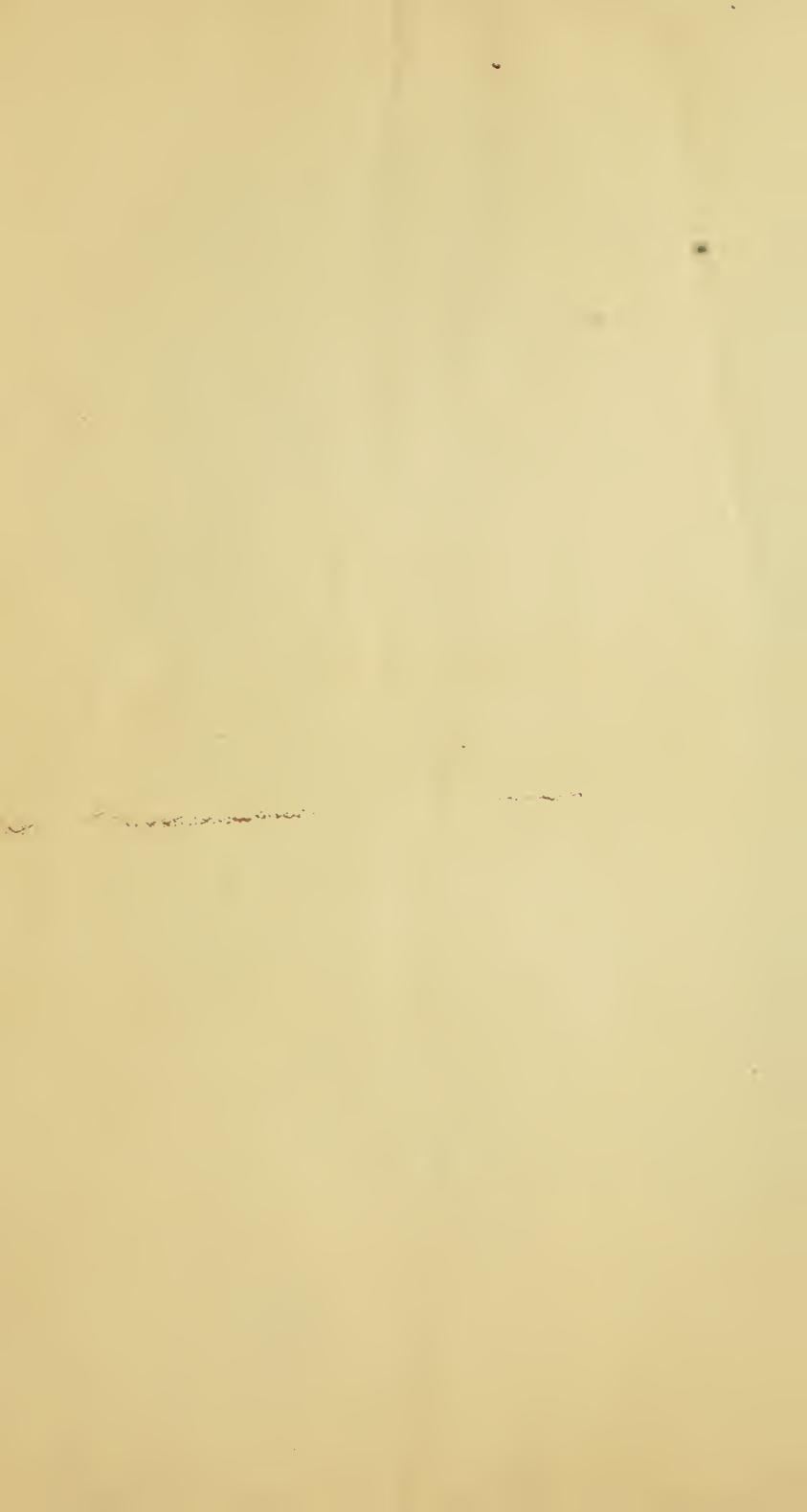






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In Memoriam.



In Memoriam.



A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE FIRST CHURCH, DORCHESTER,
ON THE SUNDAY (OCTOBER 8, 1866) FOLLOWING
UPON THE DECEASE OF
MARIA S. CUMMINS.

BY

NATHANIEL HALL.

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MAINTAINED
RECORDS TO

TO
THE MOURNING, BUT BLESSED
MOTHER
OF SO DEAR A CHILD,

This Imperfect Tribute
TO HER MEMORY,

IS,
WITH MINGLED SYMPATHY AND GRATULATION,
RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED.



SERMON.

“I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.” — JOHN xvii. 4, 5.

I TAKE this passage for a brief presentation of those points in it of practical significance to us. Its bearing upon points in controversy touching Christ's existence in time I care not to discuss; the conclusion about which, whatever it be, affecting not the practicalness and worth of those higher teachings. “I have glorified thee on earth,” said Jesus, addressing the Father in that prayer which was the touching prelude to his agony and death. How had he glorified Him? Simply, he must have meant — simply and essentially — by his life of self-devoting faithfulness to the Father's will. The glory was not in the nature of the work, as differed from that of others, but rather in the spirit with which it was accomplished. And thus we, too, may glorify God, may glorify Him on the earth. We need not wait until we reach the spheres beyond. Nay; for by glorifying Him here

comes alone the fitness for glorifying Him there, as for being glorified by Him. We cannot so wait, if there be within us any breathings of the true life. Our aim would be to glorify Him wherever he places us, in whatever He ordains for us to do or to endure. And earth would be loved, and life upon it prized, if for nothing else — and for whatever else for this chiefly — as affording field and opportunity whereby to glorify Him. Every thing glorifies its Maker that fulfills the uses He designed it for : from the sun that shines above us, to the simplest flower that opens to its beams. *These* from a fixed necessity ; *man* by a self-commanding will. There is no glory like that of an intelligent, rational being choosing the way of Duty ; putting and holding his free will in harmonious relations with the will divine. There is nothing so sublime beneath the stars, nothing in all his works God so loves to look upon, as a human spirit that has consecrated itself to a following of the Heavenly Will ; that recognizes, and is faithful to, each moral and spiritual obligation ; as true to the Divine attraction as the needle to the pole, and if momentarily disturbed and drawn aside by counter-influences, returning — how soon ! — to its fidelity. How sad the fact that so few comparatively are thus faithful ! When we think of ourselves as born of the Infinite, with a mind to apprehend Him, a heart to love Him, a power to glorify Him, by a freely surrendered will, — how

sad that so many yield themselves to the good and gods of earth, and choose to be false at once to Him and to themselves ! But there *are* those who glorify God upon the earth by true and faithful lives. God be thanked for such ! If it were only to show us the divine possibilities of our nature ; how beautiful we might make *our* lives ; what a savor of holiness we might diffuse around us while we live, and leave with our memories when we die ; what lights, what guides, what blessings above all other blessings, we might be, to the hearts that beat closest to our own, and to other hearts, in ever-widening circuit.

Jesus, in the passage before us, speaks, also, of a glory to *come*, of which, in leaving the world, he should be a recipient from the Father. What conceptions were in that holy soul when he thus spake, and what the fact in which they found fulfillment, we may not know. But whatever the glory to which, for his faithfulness, he was admitted, that, measurably, his followers, in a kindred faithfulness, must surely share. "Father, I will," he prayed, "that they also whom Thou hast given me be with me where I am." "It doth not yet appear what we shall be," said that dearest of them all, "but we know that we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." Enough, that they *are*—

those blissful awaitings; that they shall be in accord with the soul's highest life, and answer to its purest aspirations. Yes, they *are*. It cannot be a delusion. The very hope of them, in each believer's breast — God implanted, God nurtured — is itself a pledge of their realization; that hope in which he struggles on after his Master's footsteps, brightening as he nears Him; that hope which, having given their purest gladness to his prosperous hours, becomes a star of holiest cheer above his dark and troubled ones; and goes down with him, warming and brightening at each descending step, until the gate is reached that opens upward to the spirit realm. A delusion! Then is there nothing certain! Then are we living among visions and deceits! If the Record of Faith be not a fraud; nay, if these *hearts* within us do not throb to a splendid falsehood; — there is a glory to be revealed; there is a heaven for the faithful; there is a fellowship of the blessed; there is a sphere of loving service, of immortal progress, of divine beatitude. Friends, let us feel the holy incitement of this faith, as we go forward in the work given us to do! Let us feel its holy cheer, as from time to time — how often! — there go from us by death the dear and good! as even now —

“ Another hand is beckoning us,
Another call is given;
And glows once more with angel steps
The path that leads to Heaven.”

You know to whom I refer. I need not name her. You have come here this morning with hearts at once in sympathy with a bereaved household, and in sorrow for a loss we have all sustained. I would speak of her. And yet I hesitate. I always hesitate to speak in eulogy here. You will bear me witness it is not my wont. But never to do it, I cannot, as a rule, adopt. It were to deny myself a privilege and you a good. I will follow in this the promptings of my heart and the decisions of my judgment. I do so now. She was one of us, — a worshiper with us, a communicant, — from time to time, as circumstances permitted, a teacher in our Sunday-school; many of you were among her personal friends; many, not so far privileged, have had pleasure in merely beholding, as she came and sat and went, the placid and spiritual beauty of her countenance; while far and wide, throughout the land, are those who have found delight and profit in her mental creations, — aye, and beyond it, — for she had won a reputation more than national. I *will* speak of her. We shall see her no more. All that was mortal of her the grave covers. I will speak of that in her which the grave *cannot* cover.

She had gifts of intellect, beautiful and rare; a refinement of thought, a delicacy of perception, a clearness of apprehension, a felicity of diction, a purity of taste, a liveliness of imagination; — a harmony of faculties, a symmetrical proportionate-

ness, rather than a prominence of any single one, gaining for the individual the repute of "genius," and far less, in itself, for possession or use, to be coveted. But I would speak of that in her far more and greater than these — than all — gifts of intellect. *These* gave not her life its charming beauty, nor to her death its touching pathos. It was the morally lovely in her which claims here our notice; the graces of character and disposition; that inner life of sentiment and faith and affection and devotedness; that which led her to lay endowment and acquisition, in a true consecration, on the altar of Truth, of Humanity, of Religion. Doubtless, her *moral* qualities were in a large measure gifts — a natural unfolding of the God-given germ; — that sweetness of spirit which won all hearts; that genialness and gentleness, that inward repose, that generous sympathy, that charity-tempered judgment, that warm affectionateness, which made the hour of her presence remembered as a privileged hour. Like some woodland flower, of choicest tint and symmetry and fragrance, which the very heavens seem to love as they look down upon, while the light that falls upon it borrows new brightness by the contact, and the winds that sway it impart thereby an added grace, — so *she* was, — a spirit-flower, — transplanted all too soon for our hearts and needs; but not too soon to bear with it, to the Father of spirits, our gratitude for its gift; while its memory

lingers in the heart's embalmment, and faith beholds it putting on fairer, and ever fairer, loveliness, in the celestial gardens.

But not *alone* the gift of nature was that which we admired and loved in her, — the spontaneous flowering of an implanted germ, with no consciousness of earnest effort and struggling aspiration in its expanding life. Then, though admiration and love there still had been, they could not have been heightened and hallowed by moral esteem. It was not gift alone, but culture of gift; nor gift nor culture alone, but a consecration of all, and the whole being, to Duty and the Will Divine.

How unassumingly she wore the crown of her endowments! How modestly that wreath of the great public's praise which their achievements won! There was none of the littleness of egotistic display; no self-elation at accorded honours, no restless coveting of more. There was a child-like simplicity, that seemed almost as unconscious of fame as the blossom, exhibited for its rareness, of its circle of admiring eyes. It proved the elevation and pureness of her aim, — her reception of the success, so remarkable, which attended her earliest work; more remarkable then than now, when similar success — but not greater, I think, as indicated by largeness of demand — has come to be achieved. Never before, I suppose, did a writer among us, if anywhere, flame into such sudden popularity — a popularity calling for edition upon

edition of her work. Though with all the susceptibilities of youthful womanhood, with what a chastened satisfaction she received it all! — a simple gladness, less that she was famous than that she might be useful; less that she had gained the public's applause than that she had touched, to issues humane and philanthropic, the public's heart, and caused her poor "Lamplighter" to be the means of illumining other and direr darkness than that of night.

There was a susceptibility in her nature to a deep enthusiasm, — not to speak of that which was inspired by the beautiful and sublime in nature and art, — an enthusiasm for whatever was morally lovely and noble and heroic and self-devoting. How it flamed in patriotism, during our country's trial-hour! How her true heart turned, with gushing emotion, towards our country's brave and fallen defenders! Why mention this, in which she was at one with millions? Why, but to show, by another instance, how the peal of that great hour struck responsive chords in the finest-attuned natures — proving, if proof were needed, its holiness.

But I wish to speak more directly of her religious nature, and its unfoldings in character. Crowned as it is of all other excellence, reflecting on all a holier charm, so eminently was it with her. Her religion did not obtrude itself upon observation. It was less seen than felt. It was an influence, molding character, permeating the life, — a

secret force, ultimating in disposition and deed, as the sap of vegetation ultimates in bloom and fruit. It was genial as it was genuine. Doubtless, her nature modified the tone and character of it. It *was* nature, supplemented by grace. Hers was a natural religion; not as distinguished from revealed — for the Bible was to her most precious; her acquaintance with it uncommon; her quotations from it most apt in the bearing as they were accurate in the letter of them — but natural, I mean, as opposed to a formal and technical religion; and, more than this, as being a development of nature, rather than an engraftment upon it; a lifting it upwards, through its perennial inspirations, where it meets those fuller currents which Faith and Prayer set aflow; where passive tendency becomes earnest aim; and spontaneity, law; and the soul, led by a Saviour's hand, comes nearer to its Father; knows itself as his by a dearer knowledge; and kneels, in lowly adoration, before the dawning vision of an Infinite Purity. There is so much religion that is unnatural! It may be genuine and real, but there is that about it which savors of constraint, as if it were some foreign element induced upon the being, rather than an element native to it, springing up into everlasting life, finding its end, as is its origin, in God. Hers, I repeat, was a natural religion. It was not conspicuous as a distinct existence, so that one might say, "Here it is," for it was everywhere; like

the lamp set within a transparent vase — unseen, save as a diffused radiance, illumining the whole. It was with her in her labors and her recreations, in the sweetness of her smile and the genialness of her manner, in the tone of her conversation and the play of her fancy and the laugh of her merriment, in the chasteness of her thought and the breadth of her sympathies and the kindness of her judgments, — in these, no less than in the discussions, in which she so earnestly engaged, of sacred themes ; or when, meekly and reverently, she sat among us here, or drew near, in grateful remembrance, around the emblems of a Saviour's self-sacrifice. I have alluded to her reverence for revelation. Though with a lively interest in the advanced religious thought of the age, and appreciative of its just conclusions, she had no sympathy with views which base themselves on the soul's intuitions and recognize as helps and guides of secondary importance the declarations of Christianity. Nay ; never a Mary sat with more reverent teachableness at the Great Master's feet than she. In a sense most vital she was a disciple. She desired to be known as such. When she came among us she had been elsewhere a communicant, but had not joined a Church. She expressed an earnest wish to do the latter, in the feeling that she owed it to Christ and His cause in the world to avow publicly her faith in Him, to express formally her discipleship. Her views were rational and

liberal. She held, with heartiest faith, the simple truths which find expression here. She had searched, as few do, to know their foundations in Scripture and Reason; and though some of her dearest friends were of other communions, she stood, with broadest charity, immovably within her own.

The power of her religion was tested in those seasons of bodily exhaustion, alternating with partial renovation, which in the few last years were her experience. "I thank you sincerely," she writes, "for your blessing upon my past labors, and your prayer for my continued strength to use such means of usefulness as God has given me. The gifts to which you allude (such as they are) must lie fallow for a long time. I fully realize that it is better so, on every account. I pray now for the greater gifts of patience and perfect submission to the heavenly will, and for the strength which is 'made perfect in weakness.'" But a more fearful test awaited her in those months of intensest and hardly intermitted suffering, which closed her life. And still — as her prayer was — her faith failed not, nor her patience, nor her submission. He who had permitted her burden made her equal to it. Not alone with the ministries, tender and devoted, of a human affection, did she tread that painful, weary way; a Father's hand, a Father's love, were there. What blessed angels, too, with love-commissioned watch, were there, we may not

know,— as she does now. But that *He* was there, whom that familiar Psalm expresses, — fondly repeated by her in those closing hours, — “The Lord is my Shepherd,” that *He* was there, it needs no revelations of the heavenly world to assure us. Truly might she have said, as the end drew near, with a humble but blessed trust, looking up to that great “Shepherd of souls,” — “I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work thou gavest me to do.” And well may she have looked to that glory beyond — as humbly she did — repeating, with faith’s tranquil smile, those words of fathomless import, — “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man. the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.”

But enough ; too much, it may be, for the hearts of that afflicted, yet blessed home. They will forgive me, if it be so ; if, in my desire to bring instruction and incitement from that vanished life, I have drawn aside too freely the curtain of that sacred privacy. If I have touched, by so doing, one heart to holy issues ; if I have done aught to make that blessed life the more a blessing to a single soul, I know they will forgive me.

Friends, we have all our lesser gifts. Why not consecrate them, as she did hers — all we have and all we are — to Truth, to Duty, to Humanity, to God ? Why not welcome, now — now for always — His sway, whose we are, and who is In-

finite Wisdom, Goodness, Love? — The leaves are fading around us. “*We* all do fade as the leaf.” A few more revolving years, and that Autumn will have come which shall spread its tinted pall above our graves. Beyond these low skies and mortal decays, these beings that we are shall, fadeless, live. Shall it not be with the faithful good? Shall it not be, O God, with those, who, having glorified Thee on the earth, are admitted to those higher spheres of service and progress and beatitude? — Of Thy dear mercy grant it!

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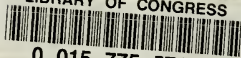


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